rationalized to optimize the existing manpower and increase its productivity. New post offices have been opened only through redeployment of existing manpower. Officers and staff are given exposure to various training programmes for upgradation of their skills. Number of new products and Value Added Services have been introduced including e-Bill Post, Track & Trace facilities in Speed Post etc.

Rural savings through POSB scheme

1135. SHRI LEKHRAJ BACHANI: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the number of POSBs (Post Office Saving Banks) now functioning in rural areas;

(b) whether the above number is higher than the number of POSBs in urban areas;

(c) if not, the reasons therefor;

(d) the share of POSBs in overall rural savings;

(e) in what manner Government would encourage rural savings through these POSBs; and

(f) whether Government are planning to introduce any new scheme under RPLI?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) 1,38,622 Post Office Saving Banks (POSBs) are functioning in rural areas.

(b) and (c) 16,537 Post Office Saving Banks (POSBs) are functioning in urban areas.

(d) The share of POSB in rural savings averages to 55% approximately. This figure is an average of percentage figures as reflected by 13 out a total of 22 Postal Circles.

(e) Rural savings will be encouraged as given below:—

(i) Specific targets are being allotted to field units to mobilize deposits, which are being monitored.

(ii) Widespread publicity is being given to POSB schemes through small saving drives in Rural Areas/Media Post/Local Dailies

Radio/TV/Pamphlets/Brochures/Local Dak Mela/Puppet Shows/ 'Bal Bachat Yojana' for school children in rural areas/small savings agents etc.

(iii) Motivational Savings Bank Training is being imparted to postal staff, Branch Postmasters, Gramin Dak Sevaks to educate the villagers about the different small savings schemes available in the Post Office and guiding them on investment.

(f) Yes, Sir. A children policy is proposed to be introduced in both PLI and RPLI. We have already sent the proposal to Insurance Division for necessary approval, which has referred the matter to IRDA.

Navaratna status to VSNL

†1136. SHRIMATI KUM KUM RAI: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether VSNL has demanded the status of Navaratna from government; and

(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) No, Sir. Videsh Sanchar Nigam Ltd. (VSNL) was a Navaratna Company before its disinvestments on 13.02.2002. Presently it is privately managed company with Central Government having only 26.12% of stake and therefore, it is not a Public Sector Enterprises (P.S.E.) and is not eligible for Navaratna status.

(b) Does not arise in view of (a) above.

Modernization of BSNL

†1137. SHRIMATI KUM KUM RAI: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are considering to provide the cheapest cellular services in comparison to private cellular services;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Government are considering to modernize the BSNL for this purpose; and

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.